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**Just use it! Linguistic conversion and identities of resistance amongst Galician new speakers**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years there has been a greater focus in language policy research on understanding how national policies are interpreted, implemented and negotiated by social actors on the ground. While such grassroots participation is at times intermittent, taken collectively, the ideologies and practices of individuals can affect societal language behaviour in a significant way. This paper looks specifically at the interplay between government and grassroots initiatives to create Galician-speaking spaces in predominantly Spanish-speaking urban settings. While official language policies in Galicia since the 1980s have increased the potential for language use through bilingual educational policies, these policies have failed to convert the large pool of potential speakers amongst a younger generation of Galicians into active language users. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with Galician *neofalantes* (new speakers) this paper looks at instances where such policies seem to have worked and where the linguistic capacity created through the education system has been converted into active language use. The article examines how such speakers rationalise their practice of linguistic conversion not as success stories of language policy but as reactions to and dissatisfaction with what is perceived as “top-down” governmentality through a reflexive process in which existing power structures are brought into question. The article looks specifically at the ideologies underpinning their decisions to become active speakers and the role they play as “invisible” language planners in contemporary Galicia.

## **Just use it! Linguistic conversion and identities of resistance amongst Galician new speakers**

### **Introduction**

When I first began investigating the Galician sociolinguistic situation in the early 2000s, my main focus was on understanding why seemingly positive attitudes towards the language had not been matched by comparable levels of active language use. The group I was most interested in at the time were young urban adults who had gone through the bilingual education system and had been exposed to the more supportive Galician language policies in place since the 1980s following Spain's transition to democracy. In my study of 18 to 25 year-old university students in the predominantly Spanish-speaking city of Vigo, I found that the majority were strongly favourable to the language but in only a minority of cases did this seem to be converted to active language use (see O'Rourke 2006, 2011).

At the time, I explained these dynamics by drawing on the framework for predicting minority language maintenance or loss proposed by Paulston (1994) where she sets out a four-point continuum of social mobilisation ranging from ethnicity to geographic nationalism. Social mobilisation refers here to the level of recognition amongst members of a minority group of certain cultural features (including language) particular to the group, together with the perception that the minority group has of its relation to some dominant 'other'. In the case of Galician, the Spanish State can be seen to represent that dominant 'other'. The first point on the social mobilisation continuum, *ethnicity*, refers to

a type of social mobilisation established on the basis of learned behaviour linked to a common past and common cultural beliefs and values (Paulston 1994). Minority groups operating within this type of social mobilisation generally tend not to perceive themselves as being discriminated against or as taking part in a power struggle with another ethnic group, and within Paulston's framework, are most likely to lose their minority language and assimilate to the language of the dominant group. My research in Vigo found that the majority of university students I queried, seemed to adopt this type of social mobilisation, defining themselves as *both* Galician and Spanish without any perceived tensions between the two elements of their dual identity. This stance then articulates, as del Valle (2000) has suggested, with the ongoing process of language shift in the direction of Spanish.

A minority of the students in Vigo, however, appeared to adopt the next point on the social mobilisation continuum – ones at which “ethnicity turn[s] militant” (Paulston 1994: 32). This second form of social mobilisation resembles that of an ethnic movement, in which minority groups adopting this type of social mobilisation perceive both common cultural values and competition between themselves and the majority for scarce resources; and in the third, these perceptions are linked to territorial demands on the part of the minority group and potentially independence. In the context of these types of social mobilisation, according to Paulston's framework, language can become symbolic of the power struggle between the minority and the dominant group. This indeed seemed to be the case for the minority of students in Vigo who identified themselves by their Galician national identity and perceived a power struggle with the Spanish state. For these students who defined themselves as first and foremost *galego*, positive attitudes towards Galician

seemed to be linked to both active use of the language and support for the politics of Galician nationalism (O'Rourke 2011).

One such speaker was Alexandra who like many other young people of her generation in Vigo had been brought up speaking Spanish at home and whose main exposure to the language was through the education system. However, unlike many of her peers Alexandra was an active user of Galician and during her late teens had in fact displaced her home language, Spanish, with Galician. She adopted this practice even with people from outside of Galicia such as me, where an etiquette of politeness would usually be adopted to accommodate to non-Galicians who were not expected to speak or understand the 'local' language. Even though I conducted my interview with Alexandra in Spanish, she used Galician and as such seemed to be taking an explicit stance on the importance of constructing and maintaining a Galician identity.

When I asked Alexandra to tell me about what motivated her decision to adopt Galician language practices, she rationalised her linguistic conversion in terms of a heightened awareness of where she was from and of the perceived problems that the Galician language had been subjected to historically. She also expressed a growing awareness of something being lost at the expense of some external force and as such perhaps challenging the homogenising tendencies of what she saw as an increasingly globalised world. In doing so, she seemed to be taking on what Castells (1997, 66) refers to as an 'identity of resistance', using this as a defensive reaction against what she saw as the disempowering and delocalising aspects of globalisation. This realisation prompted her to reflect on what she could do to change the situation and the answer she came up with was simply to use the language:

Supoño que a través de ... non sei cuando vas adquirindo consciencia de donde vives, dos problemas que se sufriron historicamente, te dás conta da situación lingüística e te dás conta de que é unha situación que non é normal, que non é lóxico que se esté perdendo a nosa lingua ou a nosa cultura, que ves que por todas partes están metendo cousas de fóra; entón, dices tu, pois isto igual habería que cambialo dalgún xeito. Entón, (a) se ves que a túa lingua se está perdendo que podes facer para evitalo? Pois, usala!

I suppose when you begin to become aware of where you live, of the problems that they suffered historically, you realise what the situation is and you realise that it is not normal, that it is not logical to lose our language, our culture, you see everywhere that we are being bombarded with things from outside of Galicia. Then you say well perhaps things will have to change in some way then if you see that your language is being lost what can you do to prevent this? Well, just use it!

While Alexandra seemed to see Galician as a resource for resistance, she was highly critical of the Galician government's language policies, which she described as “o último do último, vamos, é que ademais non teñen ningún interese” (‘the worst of the worst and on top of that they have no interest in it’). In the Autonomous Community of Galicia, macro-level governmentality spanning more than thirty years of official language policy, in particular through bilingual educational policies, has generated passive support for the Galician language but has not led to increased levels of language use amongst the majority of young urban Galicians. These largely *laissez-faire* language policies of the

Autonomous government have left many language advocates and activists disillusioned with official policy strategies which they see as not going far enough in bringing about real change for the language and its speakers. This has prompted certain sections of the population and individuals such as Alexandra to create their own language agenda and resist from below.

In the specific case of Alexandra, she has instigated change at grassroots level through her own agentic displacement of Spanish language practices for Galician ones, thereby challenging the existing status quo through her commitment to actively using Galician. Her activism illustrates how national language policy can sometimes be perceived as official legislation designed to control ‘people’s linguistic lives’ (Shohamy 2009, 185), prompting social actors such as Alexandra to resist such control and engage in what Pakir (1994, 2003) refers to as ‘invisible language planning’ through non-governmental and spontaneous language planning on the ground. Arguably, of course, through her language choices, Alexandra’s is giving visibility to her own pro-Galician language policies through her insistence on using Galician at all times in her daily life and in fact enacting a highly visible form of language planning. Social actors, such as Alexandra, can often draw on the power of human agency to resist official policies and introduce alternatives at a grassroots level (see McCarty 2011; Ricento 2000; Shohamy 2006). There is however no agency without structure (and the other way around) and both are mutually constitutive in that we produce meaning and social positioning by engaging with the norm, even if to de-align with it (Martin and Dennis 2010). Official policies, are also cultural products of human action and agency. The key issue is what discourses and policies are produced by whom, where, when, how, and with what consequences. It



therefore goes beyond the simple dichotomy of government versus grassroots practices, as both involve human practices in which different actors are involved with different interests at stake.

Critical language policy, which has been influenced by social theory (see Tollefson 2006) draws on the notion of governmentality as “the conduct of conduct” (Foucault 1991), examining the exercise of power by a range of social actors, state and non-state alike, who seek to govern the behaviour of a given population and of the individuals who comprise it. This approach facilitates a focus on how power circulates across various contexts, and has prompted an attempt to divert the focus away from official language policies and language ideologies to more local discourses and practices (see Pennycook 2006). Illuminating the diffuse nature of power central to the concept of governmentality, Alexandra’s story provides an example of how national policies are interpreted, implemented and negotiated by social actors on the ground (Cassels-Johnson 2013).

A governmentality approach also facilitates the study of resistance to such attempts at governing linguistic conduct. Drawing on Foucault’s observations concerning resistance as a diagnostic of power (Foucault 1982), Urla argues that “language-activist strategies can be seen as diagnostic of the ways in which the framework and assumptions of governmentality have in many ways set the terms of debate around language and shaped the way language practices and the speaking self are understood (2012, 16).” Woolard (1998, 17) has earlier argued that minority language movements are often founded on “the same received notions of language that have led to their oppression and suppression,” and Urla (2012, 16) similarly observes that language activists often

reproduce elements of the conceptualisation and management of language central to attempts to govern linguistic conduct in the modern nation-state – including “the notion of languages as bounded, discrete objects,” which Alexandra could be seen as reproducing through her complete substitution of Galician for Spanish. At the same time, however, Urla (2012, 5-6, 16) also notes that language activism is more than just a diagnostic of the dominant treatment of language: language revival, she argues, represents a social movement that addresses cultural domination, protesting against the subordination, de-privileging, or exclusion of a given group based on identity, a way of life, or social status while also challenging prevailing notions of speakerhood, nation, language, and the self. In this way, approaching Galician new speakers’ language activism in terms of social movement thus also links to Moscovici’s (1976) concept of “active minorities”, which refers to individuals or groups who seek to influence the practices and attitudes of the majority and thus bring social change to fruition through their (in this case, communicative) behaviour (see O’Rourke and Ramallo 2015).

Building on my first research encounter with an active new speaker of Galician, in the following sections I will draw on insights from fieldwork since 2012 in which I have explicitly sought to understand what it means to be a new speaker of Galician, what motivates these individuals to become Galician speakers, how they rationalise their practice of linguistic conversion and how they position themselves as language activists and as language planners in their own right.

Before answering these specific questions it will be useful to provide some background to the sociolinguistic and socio-political context in which contemporary new

speakers of Galician have emerged. As part of this contextualisation, I will look briefly at language policy initiatives in Galicia since the 1980s and the perceived failure of such policies to convert potential speakers of the language into active language users. Drawing on in-depth interviews with Galician *neofalantes* (new speakers) I will then examine instances where such policies seem to have worked and where the linguistic capacity created through the education system has been converted into active language use. Through these examples, I will look at how such speakers rationalise their practice of linguistic conversion not as success stories of language policy but as reactions to and dissatisfaction with what is perceived as “top-down” governmentality through a reflexive process in which existing power structures are brought into question. I will focus in particular on the ideologies underpinning their decisions to become active speakers and the role they play as language planners in contemporary Galicia.

### **Producing new speakers of Galician through official language policies**

While Spanish had traditionally dominated as the language of public life with Galician restricted to informal contexts in Galicia, more favourable language policies emerged in the context of Spain’s transition to democracy in the 1970s. In this new context, the government of the Galician Autonomous Community awarded Galician a new legal status as a co-official language alongside Spanish within the community, and post-Franco language advocates positioned the language as a central symbol of an emergent Galician national identity. In line with this co-official status, the government developed policies providing for the inclusion of Galician in key institutional contexts including education

and other formal domains from which the language had been previously absent. The inclusion of Galician in the education system has meant that today, all Galicians under the age of fifty have had exposure to the language, leading to the emergence of new learners and potential new speakers of the language in Galicia's historically Spanish-speaking urban areas. In language planning terms, this can be seen as significant in a context in which traditional communities of speakers in rural parts of Galicia are in decline (Monteagudo 2009; Instituto Galego de Estatística 2011).

The inclusion of Galician in the education system has also created a greater sense of sociolinguistic awareness amongst a younger generation of Galicians through the open discussion of the sociolinguistic history of the language, the process of language normalisation, and the role of Galician as a symbol of Galician identity. This has at the same time eliminated many of the prejudicial beliefs historically associated with the language, which had linked it to rurality, backwardness and poverty. Over the past three decades, attitudes to Galician have changed significantly, particularly amongst a younger generation who are favourably disposed to the language (González González 2011; Bouzada-Fernández 2003; O'Rourke 2011; Observatorio da Cultura Galega 2011). While the inclusion of Galician in the education system has played an important role in raising the status of the language and in producing a large pool of potential new speakers, it has not however led to increased levels of language use at a societal level. An overwhelming majority of Galicians under the age of twenty-five say they can speak Galician "well", yet less than half of the same age group report active use of the language. This figure drops to less than one fifth amongst young people living in urban areas (Instituto Galego de Estatística 2011).

Structural proximity between Spanish and Galician, both closely-related Romance languages, explains why all Galicians report passive knowledge of Galician and can engage in bilingual conversations. However, the trend amongst the majority of potential new speakers is to maintain Spanish in such bilingual conversations, even when their interlocutor speaks Galician. Therefore, one of the perceived inadequacies of educational policy, perhaps not dissimilar to revitalisation projects in other minority language contexts, has been its inability to convert this pool of potential new speakers into active users, despite their general level of acceptance and respect for the language. This mismatch is not of course surprising as language policy change in education cannot in itself be expected to change speakers' linguistic practices outside of the classroom. As many scholars have shown, no matter how accomplished schools are in encouraging language acquisition, they are unlikely to bring about increased use of the language outside of the classroom unless there are practical reasons for such use (Cooper 1989; Fishman 1991; Hornberger 2008).

A closer look at the ideologies underpinning language policy in Galicia provides some insights into the apparent mismatch between language attitudes and reported language use. Language policy has been described as largely non-interventionist and cautionary (Lorenzo Suárez 2005). This approach reflects the lukewarm levels of support for the promotion of the language by Galician branches of Spain's centre-right political parties. Their handling of the language question reflects an ideological position which has sought to maintain the linguistic and social status quo in Galicia. Reflecting the concerns of Galicia's Spanish-speaking elite, consecutive centre-right Galician governments have adopted a *laissez-faire* approach to language matters that implicitly promotes the idea of

“harmonious” bilingualism (Regueiro Tenreiro 1999) or what the Galician government has more recently termed “friendly” (cordial) bilingualism. This promotion foregrounds the non-conflictual co-existence of Spanish and Galician within the community, framing Galicia as a site of balanced bilingualism in which individuals are free to use either language in any context where neither language is seen to be used to the detriment of the other (del Valle 2000: 109-110). In doing so Galician authorities aimed to reassure the socioeconomically and politically dominant (albeit numerically smaller) Spanish-speaking sectors of the Galician population that their existing positions of power would remain unchanged. This sector of the population tends to be explicitly hostile towards the language. Such hostility stems from the perception amongst these Spanish-speaking elite groups that top-down language policies are “imposing” Galician through the education system and within Galician society more broadly. These groups constitute a politically and economically powerful sector of Galician society, characterised by conservative, neoliberal and Spanish nationalist political ideologies (Regueira 2009; González Pascual 2014).

Arguably, the promotion of “harmonious” bilingualism by Galician administrations made the majority of Galicians less consciously defensive about language issues and subsequently more accepting of Spanish as the seemingly value-neutral language (O’Rourke 2011). This can in part explain why the majority of the population take a more passive stance to Galician and show relatively low levels of investment in the language, insufficient to be converted into active use. In this sense, macro level governmentality in the Autonomous Community of Galicia has by and large produced citizens who best suit and fulfil a language policy agenda which has generated some

degree of support for the language but which has not led to any significant changes in terms of active use of the language.

At the same time, however, as I have argued elsewhere (see O'Rourke 2014) such policies may have unsettled the mood of an activist minority of the population who are highly committed to the language and who engage in the process of majority language displacement (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013) characteristic of the active new speakers of Galician at the centre of the current study. These active new speakers, who are known locally as *neofalantes*, are Galician speakers who were brought up speaking Spanish, but who at some stage in their lives (usually adolescence or early adulthood), made a conscious decision to adopt Galician language practices. In socio-demographic, sociolinguistic and socio-cultural terms they often tend to be characterized by their younger, middle-class and urban profile.

*Neofalantes* are in many ways the product of the language revitalisation policies in place since the 1980s following Spain's transition to democracy and have been exposed to Galician in domains of use from which it was previously absent including education and public administration. Through their conversion to monolingual Galician linguistic practices, however, new speakers of Galician who become active speakers of the language can be seen to fall outside the desired ideal of the type of citizen which top-down governmentality in Galicia wishes to produce. Therefore, while on the one hand new speakers are the product of such governmentality through top-down language policies supported by bilingual schooling, active new speakers can be seen as reacting to these policies and through their active use of the language engaging in a reflective

process which questions existing power structures as well as the socioeconomic and political conditions within which they are set.

*Neofalantes* are often language activists, and their decisions to adopt Galician language practices can sometimes be politically or ideologically motivated, linked to nationalist politics, questions of social justice, and opposition to the domination of Spanish (Frias-Conde 2006). In some cases this can lead new speakers to give up speaking Spanish altogether, “converting” to Galician, similar to the Catalan converts described by Woolard (1989, 2011). The conscious displacement of Spanish as their first language requires commitment and an activist stance. The Galician language converts I encountered during my fieldwork were indeed language activists but also activists and resisters on other levels. They were frequently linked to other protests or social movements such as environmentalist movements, feminist movements, anti-capitalist movements, anti-establishment or some underlying dissatisfaction with the current social order. Speaking Galician, and more concretely, adopting predominantly or exclusively Galician-speaking practices was linked to this dissatisfaction and symbolic of resistance and protest against top-down governmentality.

Drawing on fieldwork which has sought to understand the practices and ideologies of Galician *neofalantes* in the following sections I will look at how one such speaker, Alberte, rationalises his practice of linguistic conversion as reactions to and dissatisfaction with what is perceived as “top-down” governmentality. I will focus specifically on the ideologies underpinning decisions to become an active speaker and how he positions himself as a visible language planner on the ground.



### **Sites of resistance as sites of research: Galician new speakers in Vigo**

When I returned to Galicia ten years later to work on a larger research project looking more explicitly at the role of new speakers in the process of linguistic revitalisation I was looking for places in which to find new speakers. Reconnecting with Alexandra (who since our first encounter ten years previous had finished university, lived abroad for a number of years and finally returned to Galicia) led me to the alternative bars and social centres (*centros sociais*) in Vigo linked to cultural, social and political associations and where many Galician new speakers hung out. These spaces were not set up with the specific function of using Galician per se but for other social or political agendas: in addition to their commitment to speaking Galician, these new speakers were committed to a range of other causes as well, ranging from feminism to anti-capitalism. Vigo, however, is one of the most Spanish-speaking areas of Galicia, with two-thirds of its population reporting exclusive or predominant use of Castilian (Vaamonde et al. 2003). In this highly Castilianised urban setting, these centres offered what Peter Auer (1991) has referred to as “safe” spaces for Galician speakers to use the language in a city which they saw as non-conducive to living their lives fully through the medium of Galician. New speakers of Galician also saw these spaces as a place where they could meet people with similar values and interests, not limited to but including a commitment to speaking and using Galician.

As the following discussions will draw out, these active new speakers can be seen as engaging in stancetaking – which Jaffe (2009, 3) defines as “taking up a position with respect to the form or the content of one’s utterance” – through their participation in and

performance of activism. By aligning themselves socially and politically with certain agendas and building certain social relations through their linguistic practices, these new speakers highlight how the active use of Galician raises such questions as: what are social actors doing when they engage in language activism? What positions are being taken up, and by whom, with what consequences? This question of positionality, which as Jaffe (2009, p. 4) emphasises highlights how speakers position themselves in relation to other social actors and both respond to and construct a given context, then points to how language activism articulates with issues of power and social difference. Heller (2006) highlights how struggles over language are intimately bound up with questions of social reproduction and relations of power, and thus the positions that Galician new speakers take up can be studied as a lens for understanding the social processes and relations that they seek to contest through their language use. As the following discussions will draw out, however, these new speakers' performance of activism often reproduces the dominant sociolinguistic relations that they seek to resist through their reflexive language use.

The people I met at these centres ranged in age between 20 and 40 years old. The socio-demographic characteristics of the groups broadly reflect those of new speakers of Galician overall in terms of age, social class and level of education. They reported Spanish as the language that they had been brought up speaking and as the language they had used with family and friends for at least the first fifteen years of their lives. They recalled gaining passive exposure to the language in the home and community, and sometimes came from homes in which parents or grandparents spoke Galician but had

always used Spanish with these (future) new speakers. Their deliberate switch to Galician as their primary or sole language of communication during late adolescence or adulthood, as will be discussed below, was framed in terms of resistance, often in relation to the bilingual education policies that had provided the foundations for their proficiency in the language.

Having conducted interviews with twenty of these active new speakers as part of the larger study on the experiences and trajectories of Galician new speakers, I will here focus on the life-narrative history of one of these speakers in order to take an in-depth look at his accounts of how the process of converting to the predominant or sole use of Galician articulates with questions of governmentality, power, and resistance. Of particular interest will be narration of the speaker's account of his positioning on government led language policy in Galicia, the role he perceived himself playing in Galician revitalisation, and his own rationalisation of the process of linguistic conversion.

As an exemplar of the more or less typical activist new speaker profile, this individual has deployed a number of strategies for resistance, which will be detailed below. His wholesale rejection of the Spanish language – and thus of Spanishness – call into question not only the sociolinguistic but also the wider socio-political order in Galicia and in Spain more broadly. More than only questioning these dynamics though, he also positions his and other active new speakers' use of Galician as driving grassroots sociolinguistic change to challenge the state-supported social and linguistic status quo favouring Castilian.

### **The responsibility to resist: Galician new speakers as the champions of the language**

A close connection between linguistic conversion and political ideology was forged by Alberte, a new speaker of Galician who was 30 years old at the time of our interview. Alberte was brought up in the city of Vigo by Spanish-speaking parents. His main exposure to Galician was through the education system although he reported hearing the language spoken on occasions by his grandmother who lived in a village where his father had grown up. Alberte recounted how he had been 14 when he initiated his linguistic conversion, and he characterised this transition as an act of rebellion. While other new speakers I met had also referred to such acts of rebellion, Alberte described his as being politically motivated: he had decided to convert to speaking Galician as a way of asserting his Galician identity and rejecting Spanishness, thereby resisting what he saw as the historical oppression of Galicia within the Spanish state:

Pois a motivazón foi un pouco- pois non sei como dicerte, identitaria ou incluso política, non? Tomar conciencia de que vives nun país mmm- que non é o mesmo queeee- que o que toda a vida te dixeron queeee- que o- que o estado ao que pertences e ao que- (risas) e ao que debes obediencia, e que ese país, a Galiza, pois ten unha lingua distinta e ese pobo ten unha lingua i co- empezas a comprender as razóns históricas polas cuais o teu pobo e tu pesoalmente non falas esa lingua e dices ‘pois non pode ser’. Pois- pois- pois aquí para ser un pouco consecuente hai que falar o idioma que- que nos están negando aínda que coste, non? Entón foi unha- unha motivazón así un pouco- claro, esto con catorce anos pois ten un cariz igual un pouco distinto a como o estou expresando eu agora, non? É máis- máis irracional e máis- ‘pois eu sou galego e sou galego, non sou español e sou outra cousa e entón eu teño que falar galego’. Igual é un pouco así

máis automático, mas bon, o facto é queee cuando tomas a decisión, entras nun proceso que custa máis ou menos e- e a partir de aí pois en un par de anos pois xa era monolingüe

The motivations were a bit – not sure how to put this, identity reasons and even political, you know? Becoming aware of the fact that you live in a country mmm – that is not the same as –that all though your life they said that- that the – that the state to which you belong and to which – (laughs) and to which you should obey, and that country, Galiza, has a distinct language and the people have a language and li- you begin to understand the historical reasons for which your country and you personally don't speak that language and you say to yourself 'well this cannot be'. Well – well – well here in order to have an effect we should speak the language that – that we are still being denied even though it requires effort, you know? ... 'well I am Galician and I am Galician, I am not Spanish and I am something else and so I have to speak Galician'. Perhaps it was a bit more automatic, well, the fact is that when you take a decision, you enter into a process which is more or less demanding and – and from then on well in a few years I was monolingual.

There is thus a clear questioning by Alberte of how he and others around him are being governed and an evident politicisation of his linguistic conversion. He explicitly links language and the use of Galician to his and others' subordination, which he connects to a wider historical perspective in which Galician speakers were delegitimized within a

Spanish-speaking Spain. He makes reference to *Galiza* as opposed to *Galicia*, the latter being the official name used to refer to the Galician territory and that which is used by Galicia's devolved government. *Galiza* is very often used by the Galician Nationalist Party or the nationalist left as well as pro-Galician independence movements to which Alberte prescribes.

Alberte's account of his conversion seemed to articulate with a heightened awareness and questioning of what he perceived as "top-down" governmentality, with language playing a symbolic role in both governmental suppression and his individual resistance. He frames this experience in terms of conflictual struggle, raising issues of being expected to "obey" the State, "being denied" the right or opportunity to speak Galician, putting in the "effort" required to resist, and ultimately rejecting his Spanish identity and only recognising his Galician one. Alberte therefore adopts the form of social mobilisation which Paulston (1994: 32) described as "ethnicity turn[ing] militant" where there is perceived competition between 'them' and 'us' for scarce resources. For Alberte, language is symbolic of this power struggle and such tensions then lead him to seek to "have an effect" by speaking Galician. As such he moves from going from predominantly monolingual practices in Spanish to largely monolingual behaviour in Galician and thus displacing his language of primary socialization altogether. In this sense, Alberte sought to resist the linguistic governmentality of the State. However, in doing so he also draws on the very conceptualisation of language as bounded and discrete that underlie the same monolingual ideologies of the State's historical policies. As such, as Woolard (1998) points out in the context of minority language movements more broadly, Alberte in reproducing the same received notions about language and nation which led to the

oppression of Galician speakers in the first place. Not dissimilar to minority language activists elsewhere (Urla 2012), Alberte can be seen to reproduce some of the same elements of the management of language in the modern nation-state which attempt to govern linguistic conduct (see also Kasstan, present volume).

While Alberte did acknowledge that the government had put in place policies designed to support Galician, he made clear his doubts as to the efficacy and meaningfulness of these efforts: when I asked him what he thought of their language policies, he replied sarcastically by saying “is there a language policy?” He accused the government of producing empty rhetoric, highlighting that even though such a policy existed in theory, he saw this policy as having no legal weight and as being left unimplemented in practice. He sees this as being linked to a broader defect of capitalism. In light of what he saw as the failure of the State’s policies to effectuate actual sociolinguistic change through their language policies, Alberte argued that change would only happen from the bottom-up, namely through speakers of Galician such as himself who were willing to take responsibility for instigating change and demanding rights on behalf of all speakers. As Urla (2012) has observed in the context of Basque, in taking on this responsibility, Alberte’s activist role might also be seen to represent a social movement that addresses cultural domination, de-privileging and exclusion while also challenging prevailing notions of speakerhood, nation, and language:

...a administración ten un papel puro do que é a administración nun sistema capitalista, que é non facer absolutamente nada. Aquí- eh- bueno, se- se dedican a

reprimir determinadas historias i tal, mas no tema lingüístico non se meten. Non se meten, nin para ben nin para mal. Aquí as cousas as facemos- eeh- entre todos ou non as facemos. Quero dicir, eu tampouco na política lingüística é unha cousa que me preocupe porque sei que non vai a ningún lao, nin para ben nin para mal. Nin para impor un idioma nin para impor outro nin para nada. Eeeh- eu creo que o futurooo do idioma depende do que fagamos os galegofalantes. I de que cambiemos as tornas con isto, exixamos os nosos dereitos, non porque nolos dea un- unha lei ou o goberno de turno, senón porque os exiximos i exercemos as medidas de presión que consideremos oportunas, i hai que exixirlllo ás empresas, hai que exixir- hai que exixilo á sociedade i non a- ao- aos gobernos, que bueno, poden promulgar leis pa arriba pa abaixo e despois non se cumpren, dá exactamente igual. Por eso decía, aquí hai política lingüística?

...the administration has a pure role that is that it is the administration of a capitalist system, which means doing absolutely nothing. Here – eh – well, they spend their time supressing certain things and that, but in relation to language they do not get involved. They do not get involved, not for good or bad. Here we do things – eh – amongst ourselves or else we don't do them. What I means, for me language policy is not a thing that concerns me because I know it is going nowhere, for good or bad. Neither to impose one language or another. Eh- I think the future of the language depends on what Galician speakers do. That we change things, that we demand our rights, not because they are given to us because of a law or whatever government is in power, but because we demand them and we



put on the pressure that we consider appropriate and we need to demand them of businesses, we need to demand – we need to demand them of society and not of the government who well can pass laws all they like and not comply with them, it doesn't matter one bit. That is why I said, is there language policy here?

Moreover, he identifies new speakers of Galician such as himself as the individuals committed enough to the language to resist the status quo of the state's linguistic governmentality and to accept the responsibility of being the driving force behind the revitalisation of Galician. In doing so Alberte challenges notions of self, creating a new self through the construction of a new linguistic identity

Ten, ten papel [neofalantes]. Ten muito papel e ademais porqueeu eu creo que entre os neofalantes hai unha altísima porcentaxe nos cuais eh- o cambio é unha decisión consciente que tomache por uns motivos. Que tomache porque en determinado momento caíche na conta de que por al- polo motivo que for, de falar español tiñas que cambiar e falar galego. Eso ten un potencial enorme. Eso é por algo. Si estás disposto a facer ese cambio, cun cambio tan radical na túa vida é que estás disposto a dar bastante. Entón eu creo que- a ver, os neofalantes non teremos ooo galego de maior cualidade do mundo, non teremos fonética, non teremos to- un mon- un montón de aspectos formais daaa- da- da expresión oral, mmm- pero temos outra cousa, que é o compromiso. Para un neofalante falar galego é unha cuestión de compromiso. E polo menos en primeira instancia. Para un falante natural é- non é unha cuestión de compromiso, é unha cuestión natural.

They [*neofalantes*] have a big role and as well as that because I think that amongst *neofalantes* there is high percentage of whom eh- the change is a conscious decision that is made for certain reasons. That they made a decision because at a certain moment they realise that for the – for whatever reason, they have to go from speaking Spanish to speaking Galician. That has huge potential. This means something. If you are willing to make this change, with such a radical change in your life means that you are willing to give a lot. So I think that- well, *neofalantes* we don't have the best quality Galician in the world, we have the sounds, we don't have all- a load- a load of formal aspects – oral expressions, mmm- but we have something else, that is commitment. For a *neofalante* speaking Galician is a question of commitment. For a natural speaker it is – it is not a question of commitment, it is something natural.

The commitment of Galician new speakers such as Alberte is thus placed in stark contrast with what is perceived as *laissez-faire* and as such ineffective to the point of not existing, language policies of the government. In this sense, while framing his linguistic conversion in relation to the subordination of Galician speakers by the state, Alberte also seemingly recognises the diffuse nature of power central to a Foucauldian perspective on governmentality: he positions new speakers as having the 'huge potential' – in other words, the power – to effectuate change from below by resisting the state's policies and actively speaking Galician.

### **Concluding remarks**

Galician new speakers such as Alexandra and Alberte are both reacting to what they perceive as “top-down” governmentality but at the same time engaging in a reflexive process of questioning existing power structures through their active use of the language. Many new speakers of Galician support Galician nationalist politics to the far-left of the political spectrum and are sometimes linked with anti-capitalist movements, and, as I have argued above, position the adoption of Galician language practices as aligning with their political ideologies. These observations thus point to the need for future research into the complex relationship between the reflexive process of becoming an activist and the performance of a certain social persona invested with value in a given group or setting, with a focus on language issues offering an available channel for achieving these aims in contexts such as certain urban domains in Galicia. As argued by Pérez-Milans and Soto (2016), the reflexive performance of activism can play a central role in social actors’ efforts to enact certain values, personae, and stances, and thus to gain access to certain elite spaces. This article, meanwhile, draws out how the values and stances associated with the pointed adoption of Galician articulate with resistance to the language policies set out by groups and institutions occupying the elite sphere in Galicia, further highlighting the importance of considering the reflexivity of language activists and what their reflexive position-taking on language issues can reveal about the relationship between linguistic practice, political resistance, and social change.

Furthermore, for these new speakers, speaking Galician constitutes a form of resistance against the perceived inability of what is seen as top-down linguistic governmentality to bring about real sociolinguistic change in Galicia. Driven by an awareness of both the historical subordination of Galician and the contemporary

sociolinguistic dynamics of the region, they often express a strong sense of responsibility for securing the future survival of the language, as well as a clear commitment to redressing what they see as a situation of social and political injustice. Such considerations seem to prompt these individuals to change their linguistic behaviour from Spanish to Galician, in some cases displacing their first language altogether and adopting monolingual practices in Galician.

While this sociolinguistic behaviour is adopted by less than two per cent of the Galician population (Instituto Galego de Estatística 2011), such displacement of the dominant language can at least in part be explained by a shift in focus away from functionalist models of language contact and shift and towards an understanding of these processes from a language conflict perspective (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2015). As such, the practices of these active new speakers cannot simply be seen as deviations from the sociolinguistic "status quo" but both as reactions to it and as proponents of social change. Through their linguistic behaviour these speakers thus contribute to the transformation of an existing sociolinguistic order – a social order with which they are deeply dissatisfied, as evidenced by the above discussion. Changes in what is perceived as "top down" governmentality in Galicia over the past thirty years have provided the potential for this new profile of speaker to exist; the process of harnessing that potential and "becoming" a new speaker of Galician, however, is a result of grassroots resistance on the part of new speakers of the language and their ability to draw on the power of their commitment to Galician to redress the perceived inability of national policies to change the sociolinguistic order.

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